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Reichert-Harman Anti-Terrorism Bill Set for Overwhelming Approval

Washington, D.C. – Debate on the House floor today demonstrated overwhelming bipartisan support for H.R. 1955, the Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007, drafted by Congressman Dave Reichert (WA-08) and Congresswoman Jane Harman (D-CA) that aims to prevent radicalization and homegrown terrorism. The House of Representatives will cast a roll call vote later today, with expected passage of the bill. Congressman Reichert gave the following remarks in his opening statement during debate on the bill:

“While terrorist recruitment and radicalization is a worldwide problem that must be combated globally, the United States cannot afford to simply focus on eliminating terrorists abroad. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 1955, the Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007. As the Ranking Member on the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Intelligence, I would like to commend Subcommittee Chairman Harman and full Committee Chairman Thompson for working with me in drafting this bipartisan legislation.

“This legislation is focused on addressing the issue of radicalization and homegrown terrorism. While terrorist recruitment and radicalization is a worldwide problem that must be combated globally, the United States cannot afford to simply focus on eliminating terrorists abroad. It is essential that we fully understand the nature of the threat to the United States from homegrown radicals.

“In the National Intelligence Estimate on the Terrorist Threat to the US Homeland released in July of this year, the Director of National Intelligence and the National Intelligence Council assess that ‘the spread of radical Internet sites, increasingly aggressive anti-US rhetoric and actions, and the growing number of radical, self-generating cells in Western countries indicate that the radical and violent segment of the West’s Muslim population is expanding, including in the United States. The arrest and prosecution by US law enforcement of a small number of violent Islamic extremists inside the United States—who are becoming more connected ideologically, virtually, and/or in a physical sense to the global extremist movement—points to the possibility that others may become sufficiently radicalized that they will view the use of violence here as legitimate.’

“Because of the freedoms of our society and the interconnected world we live in, radical ideas spread easily. These ideas can come from overseas or from within the United States. They can come from within prisons, inside of isolated religious or ethnic enclaves, and on the internet. These ideas reach people in the privacy of their homes via the internet and can be similarly accessed by vulnerable individuals in schools and libraries.

“Unfortunately, our freedoms are being abused by individuals whose sole purpose in life is to destroy our way of life. While we have not seen radicalization to the extent witnessed in other Western countries like the United Kingdom, we have seen homegrown terrorist cells. Prisoners in Sacramento State Prison plotted to attack Jewish and U.S. military targets. Radicalized individuals plotted to destroy fuel tanks at the John F. Kennedy Airport in New York and aimed to ‘create carnage’ at Ft. Dix in New Jersey.

“While clearly law enforcement and intelligence efforts are key to intercepting and interdicting these threats, our country needs a strategy to ensure that violent radical ideologies are contained. Because of the nature of this threat, it is essential that we understand why individuals become radicalized and what we can do to prevent radical ideologies from taking hold and spreading within the United States.

“H.R. 1955 establishes a National Commission on the Prevention of Violent Radicalization and Ideologically Based Violence. This commission incorporates aspects of H.R. 1695, the PREVENT Act, which I introduced earlier this year. The purpose of this national commission would be to proactively get ahead of the radicalization problem so that, as a nation, we can combat these radical ideologies before they become widespread within our borders.

“In addition, H.R. 1955 includes provisions to help us learn from our international partners on how they are trying to prevent radicalization and homegrown terrorism. This issue is not new to many countries throughout the world, such as the United Kingdom. I believe it is critical for us to work with our international partners and learn from their past successes and failures.

“Lastly, this legislation includes provisions that ensure that privacy and civil rights are protected for all Americans.”

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